

SAYING 'GOOD RIDDANCE'

Abandoned units bite the dust

By Norm Rowland
Staff writer

CHEERS AND applause erupted Tuesday morning as a city-contracted bulldozer bit into an abandoned structure at Hilton Town Apartments, an area that has plagued Spring Branch residents for years.

Twelve buildings of the Hilton Town Apartment Complex were demolished as Mayor Bill White, District A Councilwoman Toni Lawrence and other civic leaders looked on.

"You can't have dangerous buildings in neighborhoods," Lawrence told the crowd just before the buildings were razed.

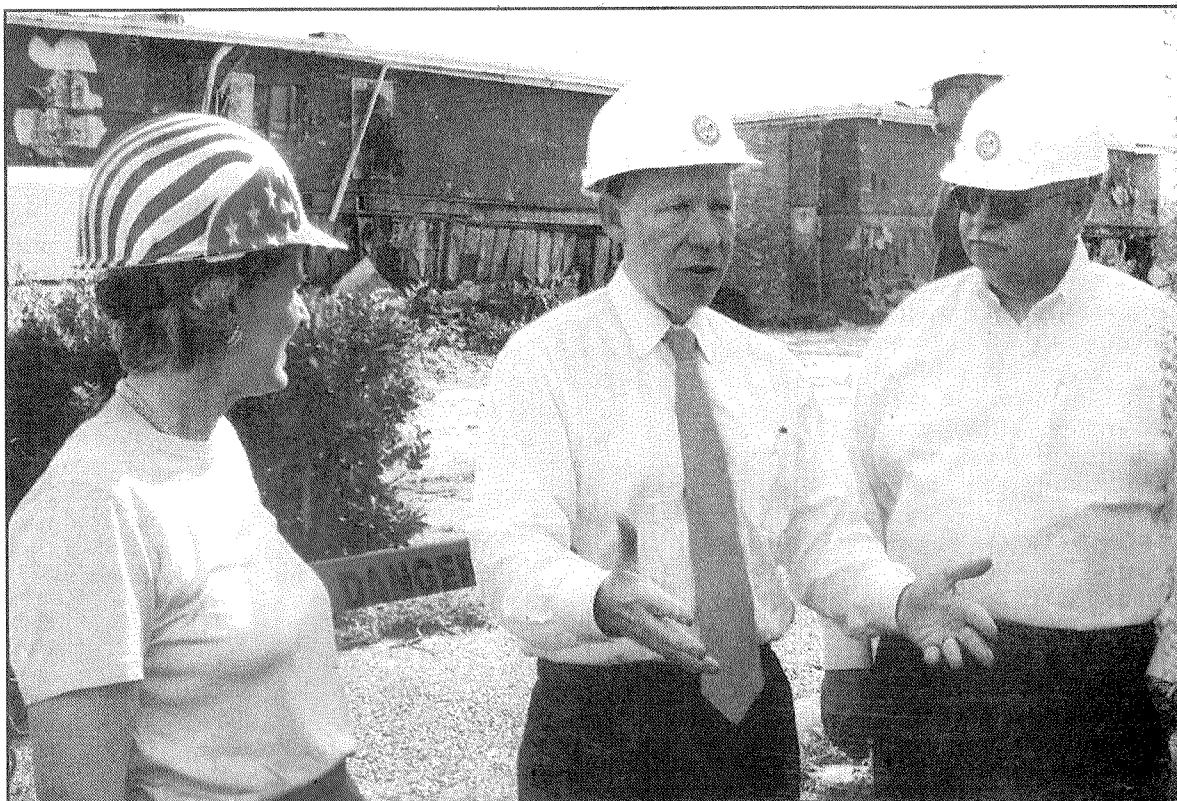
The rotting, largely unoccupied apartment community is located at 2201 Wirt and abuts Lion's Lane Early Learning Center and Landrum Middle School on the west.

White said the demolition of the buildings was overdue.

"(The building's owner) had every opportunity to see that this property didn't blight this neighborhood," White said in a short speech. "Shame on him."

He added an apology that the owner had requested no members of the media be allowed on the property.

Demolishing this section of Hilton Town is the culmination of work spanning a decade. Former Houston City Councilwoman Helen Huey first championed the neighborhood's desire to see several of these buildings removed in 1992.



Houston Mayor Bill White attends the demolition of part of Hilton Town apartments in Spring Branch. At left is City Councilwoman Toni Lawrence. In the left photo, the first of 12 buildings comes down Tuesday morning.



The Spring Branch super neighborhoods took up the fight after Huey was forced out of office due to term limits.

State law requires the city of Houston to prove that a building is dangerous.

A licensed structural engineer must inspect and survey the building in question and determine its structural integrity.

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If the building is structurally unsafe the city can then take legal action to have the structure demolished.

Even though many of the buildings in Hilton Town are abandoned and are unsightly,

they have been deemed structurally sound and therefore the city is unable to immediately demolish them, Lawrence said.

"If the property owner is not a good neighbor, I am willing to put the power of my office and the city behind efforts to tear down every dangerous building in District A," Lawrence said.